



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THREE SPRINGFIELD RESIDENTS PLEAD GUILTY TO EBAY FRAUD CONSPIRACY

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that three Springfield, Mo., residents have pleaded guilty in federal court to participating in a conspiracy in which they defrauded businesses of merchandise then sold the merchandise over the on-line auction Web site eBay.

Thomas Westwood, 35, and his wife **Jennifer Westwood**, 35, both of Springfield, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Richard E. Dorr this morning to the charge contained in a Dec. 15, 2005, federal indictment. **Kathleen Dodson**, 55, of Springfield but formerly of Ozark, Mo., pleaded guilty to her role in the conspiracy on Wednesday.

By pleading guilty, all three defendants admitted that, from September 2003 to February 2004, they participated in a conspiracy to defraud businesses and to transport stolen property across state lines.

The defendants created false Universal Product Code (UPC) labels on a home computer, Graves explained, then traveled to retail stores and affixed the false UPC labels over the true UPC labels on retail merchandise. This caused the merchandise to scan at a lower price during checkout. The fraud, Graves said, resulted in a loss of more than \$88,000 to those businesses.

After fraudulently purchasing the items, the defendants transported or shipped them across state lines to Missouri. They sold the items on Ebay, Graves said, then shipped the fraudulently-obtained merchandise across state lines to others. They used the proceeds of those sales, in part, to purchase additional merchandise at a reduced price by using the false UPC labels.

Under federal statutes, each of the co-defendants could be subject to a sentence of up to five years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000. Sentencing hearings will

be scheduled after the completion of presentence investigations by the United States Probation Office.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard E. Monroe. It was investigated by IRS-Criminal Investigation, the Missouri State Highway Patrol, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow/index.html